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In remembrance of times past

By Anne Duchêne

JACQUETTA HAWKES:

A Quest of Love
220pp, Chatto and Windus, 16.50.
0 7011 2536 5

"I am what I am—and evidently always have been. One must forgive oneself," Jacquetta Hawkes says somewhere in this book. This is one of her more modest statements in a book designed to serve a fine cause, but doing so in ways which some readers are bound to find insufferably self-centred, others tasteless, and many others uproariously funny, the solemnities of narcissism always seeming comic to onlookers: how far readers forgive her must depend upon their private prejudices, and how far they find the comedy obscures the cause.

Mrs Hawkes (one keeps the title, since she keeps the surname—and should it be said, for any uninitiated, young or exotic reader, that she is a distinguished writer on archaeology, as well as the wife, on *deux-à-deux* notes, of a distinguished elder writer, J. B. Priestley) says *A Quest of Love* is "what I regard as autobiography," but the term seems inadequate, as she recounts not only her present life, but all her previous incarnations, too, beginning with some appropriately squelchy and inarticulate private sex, and moving steadily on through, among others, her life as a Corn Priestess, a Cretan aristocrat, a Bacchante, a Roman matron of the governing class, the daughter of an Anglo-Norman lord in twelfth-century England, and a young Victorian blue-stocking invited to the small establishment at Hitchin that was to become Girtan.

Mrs Hawkes acknowledged on the radio the other day that pretending all these experiences returned to her memory during a single week was "a literary artifice"; but certainly they are presented as "products of an imagination" and "true uprisings of the psyche." Her

intentions in recounting them go, naturally, well beyond the accidents of autobiography. Each of the book's ten sections is emblematic, epitomizing one or other of the reefs—physical, social, cultural—on which successfully balanced relations between the sexes may founder.

Thus, as a prehistoric shaman, she remembers being saved from death after breaking a taboo (fishing in the men's pool) by a sailor who at once becomes her master; and as a Corn Priestess suffering exile after showing her lover the female mysteries of the temple. As the intelligent, frustrated wife of a Greek mathematician-philosopher, she committed suicide. More urbanely, her Greek lover has to renounce her, because she is a widow; and on a trip from Rome she is just a little too reasonable to agree to the desecrating roll in the temple suggested by a kinsman of her husband who is an Etruscan nationalist rather like our own Celtic ones ("it is smart to have 'Etruscan' kinsmen now, and Marius never fails to mention his"). The Church, with its savage sense of sin, breaks up her love-affair with Henry of Blois (Bishop of Winchester, and just beginning to build St Cross). It seems very familiar ground when as an advanced late Victorian she declines to yield her will to a sexually condescending suitor.

It will be noted that Mrs Hawkes always re-emerges in a very comfortable or what are known as elitist circumstances; no doubt because she has always belonged (to silly kind of superstitions here) to the 20 per cent of women which, she says, "my Bronze Age readings finally persuaded me" have, throughout history, been born with a slightly larger than normal share of active male characteristics.

Her view of women, however, is millennial, rather than modern. Acknowledging that women in a male world may be likened to secret heretics or to those settled in a foreign land who learn to speak language yet inwardly cling to their own, she despises today's radical feminism: "for women to have so little confidence in the million-year-old name and values of their sex as

to seek competitive identity with men, that surely, is humiliating in its stupidity."

Such evolution as the book posits lies, therefore, not in love and lovers—still subject to the same old attitudes towards them, in society, in public, in the home, through the efforts and example of the 20 per cent. Hence, she claims, the doom of "public complacencies" described in her final chapter, about her present life, in which she has achieved, with Mr Priestley a relationship "richer and more whole than any that went before."

After the turmoil before her much-publicized postwar divorce by day and by night, in borrowed offices and flats, in the boredom of provincial theatre and the parties of the Institute of Archaeology, they have attained "an equality of understanding" which this chapter attempts to convey, "as a proof that the setting free of women begins to offer an unbounded tension to the possibilities of human relationships." At no other time would she have known such a middle-class Englishwoman "have lived this story without social ostracism and submergence. In the hands of slave labour of a reach fulfillment through and course." So some ground has been gained and cleared: and "what a mercy it has proved to be a stumbling along to a happy end."

These quotations, inevitably, drawn on the book's dialectical passages. The individual reader to fall into the separate existence of the separate existence, to work, with the occasionally ineffectual patch of romantic plot (the Hawkes' eye-entangledness with a Kinsman with the big, blond, blue-eyed barbarian prince newly disembarked from a ship, for instance, would make Barbara Curlewish with envy).

A curious air of innocence pervades the remembered experiences, as if one were reading a Child's Guide to Sex-Social Customs, such as any enlightened mother could put on nursery shelves. Mrs Hawkes is happy to intellectual argument, and her has a seriousness that makes one forgive the oddness of her domestications.

The lives of the poet

By D. M. Thomas

YURI KRITKOV:

The Nobel Prize
Translated by Linda Aldwinckle
248pp, Hamish Hamilton, £5.95.
0 241 10240 5

I am not sure what Yuri Krutkov was trying to achieve in this novel. Was he paying his own tribute to the memory of a great poet, Boris Pasternak? If so, his 60,000 words succeed less well than the sixty-odd words of Anna Akhmatova, in her "Death of a Poet." It is worth quoting her poem, which is not only fine in itself but also persuades us of the quality of the writer to whom she is saying farewell:

The unrepeatable voice won't speak again.
Died yesterday and quit us, the
talker with groves.
He has turned into the life-giving
ear of grain
Or into the gentlest rain of which
he sang.
And all the flowers that grew only
in this world
Come into bloom to meet his death.
And straightway it's grown quiet on
the planet.
That bears a name so modest...
Earth.

Even if we had never read a line of Pasternak, we would get an impression of his character just from these simple lines. But in *The Nobel Prize* we have to take Pasternak's genius on trust. Nothing of the turbulence and infinite stresses comes across. One is the most formal way is his vocation conveyed to the reader, when he is made to ask, plaintively and narcissistically, if he may quote from his—or rather Zhivago's—poems. Of course his companion says "Of course" and we are given a sample of his verse of the Hayward/Harari translations.

Or, perhaps—in fact more probably—Mr Krutkov intended to study the tragic dilemma of Pasternak

in such puerile terms as all. It is as unlikely as another being, in which Krutkov does not believe. The most improbable events are likely in the Soviet Union; but it strains credulity to picture the poet-like Russian leader lying in bed with his wife discussing a poet.

A third possibility is that Krutkov's main intention was to explore Pasternak's tragic private life. Pasternak was torn between his legal wife, Zina, and his unofficial wife, Olga Ivinskaya (on whom the novel is largely based). The poet was younger and healthy (he would seem) to be torn in his life narrowed towards death. Apparently Pasternak wished to go in good conscience by saying good-bye to Olga and dying in the poem by his family. His wife would not forgive him all the pain he had caused her. Yet Olga, at the end, leaves him. She has, of course, her own version of what happened: a her memoir *A Captive of Time*—a chaste, but moving, and—guesses—truthful account. The death of her husband, she says, was not a tragedy, but a relief. She had been married to a poet, and with a root missing, she thinks of Lara, and in the huge gap between art and reality, she is crowded and redeemed. Possibilities can see the enormous possibilities for a novelist or poet to get to work. But both Olga and Zina are one-dimensional in *The Nobel Prize*. It is a third woman, the widow of a Georgian poet, Tabidze, who is also said to be in love with Pasternak and who wanders in and out of the book in a desultory fashion. The book is a desultory fashion, but both Olga and Zina are one-dimensional in *The Nobel Prize*. It is a third woman, the widow of a Georgian poet, Tabidze, who is also said to be in love with Pasternak and who wanders in and out of the book in a desultory fashion.

Well, of course it simply is not true. Eliot, Yeats, Pound, Borges, Frost? Or Pasternak would have had to think no further than his great contemporaries Akhmatova and Mandelstam. But the important point is that one cannot imagine Pasternak

thinking in such puerile terms as all. It is as unlikely as another being, in which Krutkov does not believe. The most improbable events are likely in the Soviet Union; but it strains credulity to picture the poet-like Russian leader lying in bed with his wife discussing a poet.

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The Chekhov of the camps

By Geoffrey Hosking

VARLAN SHALAMOV:

Kolyma Tales
Translated by John Glad
222pp, W. W. Norton, £5.95.
0 393 01324 3

I remember the old northern legend of how God created the tundra while he was still a child. There, childhoodly fresh and vivid, and their subjects were simple. Later, when God grew up and became an adult, he learned to cut out complicated patterns from his pages and created many of the birds. God grew bored with his former child's world, so he threw snow on his forest creation and went south forever.

Thus Varlam Shalamov in "A Child's Drawings" one of the most haunting of his collection of stories. It was in this same God-forsaken and snow-covered landscape that the Soviet state decided, in the mid-1930s, to begin the mass exploitation of underground gold seams by means of slave labour of the despotic kind. Slaves, as is well known, are relatively unproductive: that has always been held to be the price which their owners paid for not giving them any wages. The NKVD, however, resolved to try and overcome the reluctance of their prisoners to work through the goad of hunger, that is, by deliberately undernourishing them unless they achieved high production norms. The result of this drastic device was, of course, that most of their slaves died.

But then, unlike traditional slaveowners, the NKVD paid nothing for their slaves, and could always replace dead ones by enslaving more people. Kolyma was the ultimate pole of this inhuman system: a whole frozen continent, cut off from the rest of the Soviet Union (where labour camps formed a mere "archipelago") by hundreds of miles of wilderness, and always reached, therefore, by convict ships whose conditions recalled the Atlantic slave crossings of their worst. Robert Conquest, in his study of the region, *Kolyma: The Arctic Death Camps* (TLS, May 12, 1978), estimates that three million prisoners probably died there under Stalin.

It was as long ago as the early 1960s that Shalamov's astonishingly brief sketches of life in the labour camps began to trickle out into the embryonic samizdat network just beginning to form in Moscow, Leningrad and one or two other Soviet cities. Solzhenitsyn, before he came to put together the *Gulag Archipelago* in the late 1960s, recognizing the importance of his testimony, he even invited Shalamov to share the authorship of his memoirs, and almost omitted Kolyma from his account, deferring to Shalamov's superior knowledge of this nightmare circle of Stalin's inferno.

Shalamov's experience in the camps was longer and more bitter than my own, and I respectfully confess that to him and not to me was it given to touch these depths of bestiality and despair towards which life in the camps dragged us all.

Shalamov was too ill to accept Solzhenitsyn's invitation, but in his own right he is one of the most important of Gulag's chroniclers. In spite of this, his account has taken far longer to reach the English reader even than Solzhenitsyn's. (A sobering thought for those who imagine that it is easy for "dissidents" to get themselves into print in the West.) His stories began to come out in Russian in 1965 in the New York émigré journal *Novyi Zhurnal*, but in scattered penny packages of one or two at a time. Some samizdat authors at that time were managing to establish regular contact with Western journalists, and even to protect their rights; but Shalamov, old and ill, could not do nothing to ensure more adequate publication of his works. From 1969 the old selection appeared in French, German and Italian (the first French edition, unfortunately, was a poor translation), but it was not until 1973 that a complete Russian edition of his stories was at last brought out by Overseas Publications Inter-

change Ltd, in London. The present volume, containing twenty-four stories, or about a quarter of the total, is the first in English.

The reader who comes to Shalamov with Solzhenitsyn in mind is bound to be a little disorientated at first. Shalamov does not aim at a panoramic view of the camp world. He contents himself with fragmentary insights, choosing the short story or sketch as his basic literary form. He eschews anything approaching the passion and bitterness of Solzhenitsyn's language, adopting instead a studiously cool and neutral tone. Most of his stories focus on just one person or incident, and even within this self-limitation the presentation is spare. Nature descriptions are straightforward, crunched in the crude primary colours which are all that God had on his childhood palette. Physical description of people is minimal: a face or a hand seen in the dim light of a candle, a gesture cramped in the cold.

Psychological analysis and internal reflection are equally simple—though very precisely traced—for human psychology is blunted by cold, hunger and overwork to admit of only the crudest responses. Even the action of each story is presented laconically, with essential links merely hinted at or even unexplained, the logic of events being supplied only by the authority of the narrator, the designs of the authorities. The reader, like the newest arrival from a convict ship, has to unravel this logic himself, sometimes from the slightest of clues, until he has learnt his way around this strange and horrific world.

In his informative introduction, John Glad indicates that the classical author to whom Shalamov stands closest is Chekhov. The comparison is an apt and chilling one. The two worlds they describe are about as remote from one another as can be imagined, yet both writers have a capacity for brevity and apt selection of detail. Chekhov, working within a million of complex social conventions, lets individual gestures, articles of clothing or pieces of furniture evoke the associations in the reader. Shalamov presents a much starker world, in which these details are, if anything, even more significant because they are now a matter of survival itself. This certainly gives the Chekhovian techniques a new edge. Where Chekhov describes an evening stroll along the sea shore, Shalamov, in the same tone, describes exhuming a corpse to steal its clothes for warmth. The contrast between the restraint of his manner and the horror of his subject is what gives Shalamov's work its peculiar distinction.

In outlook Shalamov is an unreserved pessimist. If Solzhenitsyn was able to believe, sometimes at least, that labour camps offered the opportunity of self-discovery and redemption through suffering, Shalamov rejects this idea as self-deception. "The camps are a negative school of life in every respect. Nobody will ever learn anything useful or necessary from them..." This most he will concede is a certain "spiritual calm", born of the hopelessness of trying to fulfill the official production norms, through acceptance of the inevitable. This is a calm "achieved by the dulling of the senses..." and reminiscent of "the dungeon's supreme freedom". Shalamov is a pagan: he does not think in categories of sin and redemption, and for him man is created not in the image of God, but of rocks, trees and animals. In the story "Sententious" he remembers his recovery from total exhaustion bordering on death, and in his return to humanity he finds it possible to return to elemental realities and to animals much earlier than to people, from whom he remained separated by "bitterness" (*zloba*). "Bitterness was the last feeling with which man departed into nothing, into the world of the dead. But what is dead? Even a stone didn't seem dead to me, not to mention the grass, the trees, the river." In similar vein, he experiences fellow feeling for the dwarf cedar, the little tree which stumps and spreads its branches along the river, but straightens up again when spring comes, and shares with men the capacity for hope, sometimes mistaking a temporary thaw for a change of season.

In practice, Shalamov does not always exemplify the despair he professes. The characters who make

up his various narrative personae are not totally corrupted by camp life. They do not betray others, they do not beat up and murder their fellow inmates, even if they accept these practices as customary and natural when others commit them. Shalamov comes over as a person who would rather retire into inaction and passive acceptance, while continuing to observe for himself a minimal code of duty. On one occasion ("My First Tooth"), he actually protests against the guards' arbitrary beating up of a prisoner, simply because his conscience stirs him to. His ethic, in fact, while not Christian, is close to that of the most highly regarded pagans in Dante's *Inferno*, the Stoics.

Shalamov has, moreover, the reserve which one associates with the Stoics. He never narrows his own distance from his characters, even from those through whose eyes he is conducting the narration. This contrasts strongly with Solzhenitsyn's method, which is to plunge into the dirty world of the people he is portraying, sharing their feelings and even their language, to the point where one is sometimes not at all certain whether it is he or they speaking. Compared with this, Shalamov's technique seems cool and almost distant. Perhaps for him the experience of writing has been like that which he describes in "My First Tooth": "Even if you can't get something published, it's easier to bear a thing if you can write it down. Once you've done that, you can forget it."

Shalamov holds that the capacity to forget distressing experience, in so far as it is an essential part of man's remarkable endurance, shown in the camps to be greater than that of any animal. "A human being survives by his ability to forget." Yet writing, of course, is remembering in order to forget. On his eventual release from Kolyma, Shalamov recalls how he had to struggle against the temptation "to forget everything, to cross out twenty years of my life—and what years!" The method of his ambivalence lies on his stories, in their distant and disillusioned manner, and even more, perhaps, in the casual and unstructured way in which they have been published, as though the writer, having said what he had to say, had gone through should be remembered after all, was then anxious to be rid of them and forget them.

Does the same ambivalence also explain why there is no apparent overall structure in the *Kolyma Tales*, even in their full Russian version? They do not seem to form a cycle in the usual sense. There is no obvious first or last story, nor any apparent grouping within the collection, though of course similarities of theme can often be found. The order of presentation in the 1978 Russian edition seems haphazard, and the order of John Glad's selection is quite different from that, though somewhat more logical, in that he has grouped the tales loosely according to subject-matter. But it may be, in fact, that the stories are like the nameless convicts in "Sententious" who "materialise out of nowhere—one after the other" after work in the evening, and then next morning "disappear for ever".

The orphaned condition of these stories makes the job of editor and translator even more important than usual. Given that it was not possible to publish the whole collection at once, Glad has done, it seems to me, a good job with the selection and arrangement. I found here most of my old favourites from some time ago: *Zhizn' Zhivago*, as well as one or two striking items which had not caught my attention before. About the translation I have somewhat more reservations: on the whole it captures Shalamov's tone of voice well, but it contains some noticeable errors on a brief check, one or two omissions, which are quite inexplicable in such concise texts. All the same, with this volume the work of bringing Shalamov to an English-speaking public has at last got off to a serious start. One can only hope that the other stories will appear before long too. It seems the least we can do for a writer whom Solzhenitsyn, with good reason, invited to become the co-author of his own greatest work.

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commentary

Receding futures

By Richard Calvocoressi

The Shock of the New
BBC TV

Anyone expecting a crash course in modern art will be—perhaps already has been—disappointed by BBC television's *The Shock of the New*. Its author and presenter, the journalist Robert Hughes, has decided instead to give us a selective and highly critical account of that most elusive of phenomena, the "modernist spirit" in art and architecture, in which a number of important twentieth-century artists are left out altogether—among painters, Beckmann and Dubuffet spring immediately to mind—because their achievements are too individualistic to be used as illustrations of his argument.

We are not supposed to infer from this that Hughes is unsympathetic to their work—far from it—but the exclusion of all major sculptors except Brancusi (who is allowed about two minutes in a programme otherwise devoted to Northern Romantic painting) is an extraordinary omission, whatever point one is trying to get across. We are shown nothing of the work of Gaudier-Brzeska, Epstein, Gonzalez, Giacometti, David Smith, Moore or Caro; the challenge which faced artists, architects and even politicians after the last war, of elevating non-descriptive sculpture into an outdoor public art, is totally ignored. Hughes evidently responds more passionately to architecture: indeed, his scathing attack on the moral pretensions and social disasters of the International Style in "Trouble in Utopia" (Programme 4) is probably the most coherent and persuasive piece in the series, although it repeats material first explored by Christopher Norr in his controversial City of Towers film in 1978.

The Shock of the New consists of eight programmes, each lasting an hour. The first two deal respectively with reactions to technological change and with the cataclysmic effect of the First World War on the consciousness of European artists. Attitudes to the machine and, especially, to mechanized motion, ranging from Futurist enthusiasm to Dadaist disdain, are set against a background of stirring advances in science and industry. There is a good deal of social and political history, shown mainly through old newsreel film, much of it familiar. Hughes is at pains to emphasize the simultaneity of experience—the way events happened at once or seem to succeed one another with ever-increasing rapidity—and, in later programmes, the ceaseless flow of broadcast information, both of which radical artists attempted to come to grips with and which became the central preoccupations of modernist imagery. This characteristic rhythm of twentieth-century life is used by Hughes as an excuse for some of the discontinuities in the narrative structure of each programme: like the modernist artist, we are forced to adapt to sudden, unexplained switches in time and place. Programmes 3 to 8 take us on a breathless journey through French colourist painting, rationalist architecture and design, (including abstract expressionism) and Pop, ending up with a brief and not very encouraging look at the art of the

past fifteen years. It is an uneven but always invigorating ride.

Hughes's personal style also takes some getting used to, though after a while it becomes clear that beneath the detached, tongue-in-cheek manner and the Clive Jamesian weakness for appalling puns lies a consistency of approach and even a serious concern for the future of art. Viewers wooed by the smooth tones and polished phrases of a Kenneth Clark will be put off by Hughes's abruptness and irony; no aesthete, he treats art with the irreverence his swaggering appearance suggests. This is refreshing. Despite his tendency to draw glib conclusions, his lucid descriptions of works of art are often intelligent and perceptive; at his best, he makes us want to look at those works afresh. But we may at times question his judgement, as when, for example, he reduces the complexities and ambiguities of Duchamp's *Large Glass* to little more than a mute hymn to masturbation. A similar kind of trite Freudianism colours his interpretation of "Les Femmes d'Alger", which he reads as expressing Picasso's "fear of castration"—a fear he later identifies in the paintings of two great twentieth-century painters, Kirchner and (with more justification, perhaps) Munch.

Hughes's obsession with Paris as "the modernist capital" allows him to mention Vienna only twice in passing throughout the whole series: as a backdrop to Kokoschka's early portraits in Programme 6, and even more obliquely, during a memorable interview in the final programme with a tortured-looking Arnulf Rainer, surrounded by death masks. Apart from Kokoschka, no Viennese artist or architect active during the last twenty or thirty years of the Habsburg Empire features in the series.

This unbalanced view of early modernism is partly made up for by Hughes's loving evocation of the now almost vanished worlds of Cubist and Surrealist Paris. Otherwise it is a shame how rarely *The Shock of the New* conveys a strong sense of place, given the exotic locations to which our intrepid reporter is taken by courtesy of the BBC. Time Life may Reiner, *Moving Pictures* (Munich). We watch Hughes drinking coffee under the arcades in Turin, summoning the ghosts of Nietzsche and de Chirico; smoking a cigar in a deserted Brazilian driving a jeep down Manhattan; walking in the scorched and windswept Nevada desert; addressing us from Hitler's restaurant at Nuremberg; interrupting a Buddhist ceremony in the Ratko Clapel at Houston.

A lot of this elaborate scene-setting has gone into the series, much of it unnecessary (Hughes, standing in front of the ruins at Dachau, in Programme 6, embarks on the awkward attempt in Programme 3 to convey the flavour of the Mediterranean), or both. Too often works of art are set to music—and on one occasion to dance—at the expense of providing us with more information, although in the case of Beethoven's Ninth, which revolves to the sound of ecstatic laughter in Programme 5, this is quite effectively managed. (The music throughout has obviously been chosen with care: all the more infuriating, then, that the BBC individual places its own credit.) All good television, perhaps, but at a total cost of half a million pounds, is it really justified?

Certain things in the series,



A Fuseli from the mixed exhibition of British figure drawings, Dala prints and works by Mutton in the Prints and Drawings Gallery of the British Museum until next spring.

though, are of more lasting value: film sequences of artists and architects talking about their work; some of these sequences, archival (Malcolm Muggeridge interviewing Ball about his monstrosities), otherwise made especially for the series; the imaginative recreation of aspects of mass urban culture in Programme 7 to indicate its ambivalent relationship with Pop; and, finally, though one does not include it without qualification, Hughes's own polemic.

Filming for *The Shock of the New* began in Berlin in the autumn of 1977 at the remarkable group of exhibitions gathered together under the collective title of *Trends of the Twentieth*. Hughes reviewed those exhibitions in *Time* magazine (whose art critic he has been for the past ten years) and much of his initial reaction is transferred, without loss of force, into the television series, becoming one of its dominant themes. "This was the last period," he wrote in 1977, "in which the dream of the engaged avant-garde seemed credible; that corrupt societies could be toppled and utopias created with the aid of art. How Dada, surrealism, constructivism and the Bauhaus articulated this dream—and witnessed its failure—is the broad subject of these shows." In the final programme, "The Future that Was", Hughes examines the historical function of the avant-garde and considers how its role has been neutralized by a combination of pressures, of which fashion, the art market and the notion of the museum as a container of modernist cultural artefacts are the most conspicuous. Seeing how some artists in the 1970s tried to sidestep the system, by executing works of art whose physical alienation from both

spectator and museum made it impossible for them to be collected, makes for some spectacular television. In particular, an undecipherable, inaudible, and almost incomprehensible performance in which the artist Stuart Brisley pushes himself to the limits of his endurance, and a haunting film of Walter de Maria's "Lightning Field" in a remote corner of New Mexico.

Much of Hughes's thesis for the series is contained in a lengthy article for the *Sunday Times Magazine* published as a farewell to the series. It ended, as this series ends, on a note of relief—relief that such a determined view of art history has at last been abandoned. The series has at least been abandoned, but it is not clear whether Hughes's polemic is the absolute value of merely the series would better have been the expression of collective feelings. The estrangement of modernist thinking is over. As we enter the 1980s, Hughes's message (not as fashionable one) is clear: "The rules, OK!"

A Polar Explorer

All the huskies are eaten. There is no space left in the diary. And the beads of quick words scatter over his spouse's sepioid face adding the date in question like a mole to her lovely cheek. Next, the encephalitis of his sister. He doesn't spare his kin: what's been made is the highest possible latitude! And like the silk stocking of a burlesque half-nude queen, it climbs up his hip, gangrene.

Joseph Brodsky

Translated by F. F. Morton

commentary

Sweet village landscapes

By Graham Reynolds

Thomas Gainsborough
Tate Gallery

As the first comprehensive exhibition of Gainsborough's work for nearly a hundred years this event will play an important part in consolidating his reputation as one of the eighteenth-century British painting which is now under way. The content of the exhibition has been chosen, and the admirable catalogue written, by John Hayes, Director of the National Portrait Gallery. He is the author of the definitive catalogue of Gainsborough's drawings and of a forthcoming one of his landscape paintings. It is natural that his selection should reflect these areas of study, and the balance of the exhibition is tilted towards Gainsborough's activity as a landscape painter than to those full-length portraits which greet us with such engaging familiarity in countless houses and galleries here and in the United States. Gainsborough, who wrote to Jackson "I am sick of Portraits and wish very much to take my violadamba and walk off to some sweet village where I can paint landscapes and enjoy the fag-end of life in quietness and ease," would have approved of the emphasis placed on the aspect of art for which he had most natural inclination.

The oil paintings are arranged in a chronological sequence which follows the migrations of Gainsborough's studio from Sudbury to London, back to Sudbury, then on to Ipswich, Bath and finally to London for the last fifteen years of his life. It is a career in which the provinces have played a surprisingly important role for a country in which local schools of art have not normally flourished. The presence of potential sitters for portraits was in each case the motive for his move; the fact that in each section of the exhibition similar numbers of landscapes have been available to balance the portraits shows how consistently Gainsborough sought relief from being "chiefly in the face way". The earliest portraits reveal him as a naive face painter, gifted with the talent for capturing a likeness, but presenting it with an artlessness comparable to that of modest contemporary miniaturists such as Gertrude and Luke Sullivan.

He was already viewing landscape with a sharp eye and painting it with a more instructed sense of style, as the newly discovered "View of St. Mary's Church, Haddenham" reveals. At almost the same moment he achieved that enchanting combination of landscape and portraiture of which the National Gallery's "Mr and Mrs Robert Andrews" is the perfect exemplar. This delectable phase of Gainsborough's painting is represented here by "Henrietta Lloyd and her Sister" from the Fitzwilliam Museum, and the double portrait from the Louvre which John Hayes convincingly accepts as showing Gainsborough with his wife Margaret, whom he married in 1746. A French accent derived from his early association with Gravelot is especially pronounced in this rococo gem.

But Sudbury, Suffolk was no place for a Gainsborough, and his move to Bath in 1759, when he was thirty-two, brought him into a broader world and spurred him to a new maturity. Nothing in his earlier work quite prepares us for the originality of "Ann Ford, later Mrs. Thicknesse" painted in 1760, in which his enthusiasm for Van Dyck and his love of music are fused in the inventive calligraphy of his established manner. Van Dyck was to be studied near at hand in a dozen country houses, and Gainsborough translated his air of aristocratic aloofness into the more informal elegance of the eighteenth century. His landscape of these years also reflects the influence of earlier masters. With drawn from the direct observation of Suffolk hedges and trees, he explores a world of imagination lit sometimes by the cold blues and greens of Claude, more frequently by the roseate hues of Rubens's landscape. The latter style was encouraged by his beginning now to work by candlelight.

Gainsborough's final move to London after fifteen years' practice in Bath was hastily decided, but proved a prudent step. Although his relations with the Royal Academy were marked by quarrels about the hanging of his paintings he was warmly supported by the Royal Family and the hon. John, the Morning Walk, painted for the marriage of William and Elizabeth, is one of the summits of his achievement in London, intensely actual and at the same time full of feeling. But his prosing desire to escape from commissioned portraiture is revealed by the riches of the last room at the Tate, devoted to his late landscapes and the "fancy pictures" in which he approached as nearly as his temperament would allow the poetic and historic illustration so strongly

advocated by Reynolds and his fellows as the height of artistic ambition.

In one of his many moments of self-criticism Gainsborough said of Reynolds: "Damn him, how various he is!" It is true that neither Gainsborough's training nor his taste led him to cast his sitters in the mould of Michelangelo's Prophets, or Reynolds did in his portrait of Mrs Siddons as the Tragic Muse. But this exhibition displays his innate resourcefulness in technique and presentation. For instance, his method of drawing ranges from simple pencil outline through stumpy work, watercolour and gouache to oil, and each choice of medium diversifies his invention.

The introductory note to the catalogue refers to the financial constraints imposed on the presentation of the exhibition. These are to be welcomed if they are responsible for the uncluttered and logical way in which the works are displayed. We do not have to view them swathed in bunting or search for them amidst banks of roses, nor are they shown in the sort of labyrinthine maze which made the Tate's Constable show so hard to enjoy. But one point of presentation deserves discussion. The whole exhibition is lit artificially by harsh spotlights. Both music and energy could be saved by natural light, and this would enable a far truer estimate to be formed of the tone quality and condition of the paintings. It may be argued that Gainsborough chose to paint by subdued or artificial light. But his subdued light was modified daylight, and his artificial light was candlelight.

The present lighting also exacerbates the difficulties of hanging on a wall the variety of styles necessarily in very different states of cleanliness and preservation. The juxtaposition of the badly bloomed canvas of "The Revd Sir Henry Bate-Dudley" with the shiny new varnish of Johann Christian Fischel's "The Morning Walk" is a cruel relief. The raking light on "Ann Ford" blinds the spectator on close approach and makes it impossible to decide how far the painting of the head approximates to its original state.

Dr Hayes explains that he has cast his introduction in the form of a short biography and bids us look

elsewhere for critical or art-historical appreciation. But to a greater extent than in most artists the biography is both the art and the criticism. The walls of the exhibition echo the facts of Gainsborough's life and character; the excitability only just this side of sanity, his enthusiasm for dogs (the earliest dated painting is of "Bumper", a most remarkable sagacious cur"), music and musicians, country folk and above all the countryside. Only in some *musée imaginaire* shall we be able to see all the peaks of his achievement. "The Mall" all aflutter like a lady's fan, cannot be moved from the Frick Collection in New York, where it is housed amidst its peers of all European schools of painting. Nor can the "Blue Boy" be lent from the Huntington Library and Art Gallery.

In the latter case Dr Hayes has given us an acceptable substitute in "Paul Cobb Meaden", and defused the argument about the use of blue as a foreground colour by pointing out that this "Van Dyck" suit was a studio property in which any sinner might have chosen to be painted. Further gaps caused by the decision not to borrow from London public collections such works as "Cornard Wood" and "Mr and Mrs Andrews" can be made good by visits to the National Gallery and Kenwood. Such works will be included when a remodelled version of the exhibition travels to Paris next February.

Even without these potential embellishments there is richness enough here to convey Gainsborough's range and achievement. Above all, the opportunity to see so many of his landscapes enables us to decide whether we agree with Hazlitt that they are "flimsy caricatures of Rubens" or with Constable that "the stillness of noon, the depths of twilight, and the dews and pearls of the morning, are all to be found on the canvases of this most benevolent and kindhearted man".

John Hayes's catalogue for the Gainsborough show, 158pp, £2.50 (hardcover in colour), is available from the Tate Gallery Publications Department, Millbank, London SW1P 4RG, at £3.25 paper (0 905005 72 4) plus £1.50 post and package. A cloth-bound version will be ready in mid-November at £4.75.

Party conversations

By David Edgar

Traitors
Hampstead Theatre

In the introduction to his play *State of Revolution* Robert Bolt says that the events of the Russian Revolution were so terrible, the endeavours of its leaders so total, and the outcome "so tragically far short of what they had intended", that for him "merely to think about it steadily is to be overwhelmed by primitive pity and awe". Bolt's intelligent and meticulous play, however, itself falls short of its own tragic aspiration. By concentrating on the great personalities at the centre of the Bolshevik Party, it became a compound of detail, a series of passionate debates on important but strangely abstract themes. The absence of the millions stripped both the characters and their enterprise of a sense of historic scale.

In *Traitors*, the Australian writer Stephen Sewall faces the same problem in reverse. His story of the conflict between the Left Opposition and the increasingly Stalinized secret police in the Russia of the late 1920s is set among the anonymous rank-and-file of the Communist Party. But Sewall, who clearly knows his stuff, is so careful not to bore us with the specific issues of the Bolshevik split that he leaves the play as a

series of formal meetings, where the characters are reduced to the level of abstract figures. The play is a study in the failure of the individual to make a difference in the face of the machine. It is a play about the loss of the individual in the face of the machine.

the characters: Sewall's protagonists appear as isolated, anxious, almost passive individuals moving through an alien landscape, rather than active participants in a violent struggle for power. His most interesting character is a young woman who is ignorant of all the social forces heaving beneath them, but his specificity robs them both of the generality and the grandeur of tragic and epic heroes. Sewall works on an anecdotal level; he gives himself the freedom of fiction, but the story he creates, though clearly intended as a particularization of the general, remains a parable rather than a paradigm. The personal and sexual scenes are richly and sensitively written; the scenes of political debate seem pedestrian—they feel like an over-cautious translation. Sewall is so keen to avoid anachronism, for example, that his dialogue frequently relies on the blandest figures of speech.

Nell Johnson's production at the Hampstead Theatre is controlled to the point of constriction. The best performances come from Colin Baker as a nervous apparition, accommodating himself to Stalinist realities, and Emma Piper as the Trotskyite organizer, John Byrne's son—a wall of peeling icons divided by a grey corridor, bleakly lit with naked bulbs—provides the kind of historical manner that is absent from most of the play.

The RSC's popular production of *Nicholas Nickleby*, in David Edgar's adaptation (reviewed in the TLS on June 27), returns to the Aldwych for a season from November 13 to January 3. Edward Petherbridge, Roger Rees and David Threlkeld re-

turn to the stage in a production of *The Merchant of Venice*, directed by John Gielgud, at the Old Vic, from November 13 to January 3. The production is a collaboration between Gielgud and the playwright, C. P. Scott. It is a production of the play that is a study in the failure of the individual to make a difference in the face of the machine. It is a play about the loss of the individual in the face of the machine.

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only be to poetry itself. This victim did not spring from formal aesthetics; she had understood damage must come from utilitarian hope that art could be good. And she made grandiloquent claims for poetry. To be a human being is now pertinent, because it is needed... The doctor and priest are humanly more important.

But poetry was her work and would not exchange her work for any other... Only such as were held responsible for the blood of God... But if this is a Judgement Day of the world, I am guiltless."

It is indeed to the world—in her press as in her poems—Tsvetayeva gave so much energy in the last decade of her life. She might say in a letter to Tsvetkov from Clumarr on November 24, 1933:

I write almost no poems. This is why: I cannot finish in one poem what I want to say, the circles, the whirlpools cannot write my current pieces and poems both at the time...

But Tsvetayeva remained alive to herself, in every way found: And we can only be true to J. Marin King for bringing across to us in English.

Civilization on horseback

By Owen Lattimore

S. JAGCHID and P. HYER:
Mongolia's Culture and Society
461pp. Folkstone: Dawson. £12.50.
0 7129 0892 7

Slowly, this ill-defined but earnestly striving character, the informed General Reader, is being given access to more solid stuff about the Mongols and their history than verbal Hollywoods about a Chingis Khan who arose unaccountably from nowhere to lead "savagely" (with the implication of overwhelming numbers) out of the Cold Desert (with the implication of a howling wilderness). In fact, the Mongols do not mean "gobi" in Mongol does not mean "desert", for which there is a separate word. The Mongols in their great campaigns normally won with smaller numbers against larger numbers: they won, precisely, because they were not ravaging savages, storming blindly ahead; they were the best equipped, most intelligently trained, highly disciplined soldiers of their time. They were guilty of atrocities, but these were not a tradition of their own; rather they were a technique of genocidal war endemic in the "civilized" Central Asian oasis-states, which the Mongols learnt and took over when conquering those states. (The slaughter of colossal numbers is also recorded, by the Chinese themselves, as characteristic of the period of "warring kingdoms" out of which grew their own "civilized", unified empire.)

As for Chingis Khan, he was not a family which had once enjoyed something of royal power, from which it had fallen. In such a family and he have other examples in the history of nomads: a knowledge of statecraft, as well as of the military art, was passed on from generation to generation. Chingis began by uniting the Mongols, not uniting them for the first time. He put back together tribes which had fallen apart in the decline of a former "Kingdom of horseback" which had called itself Khitan-Mongol. "All the Mongols" he never fought a campaign without careful political preparations and alliances, and he never broke an alliance without first making moves that convinced his own followers (and potential new allies) that he was acting for the greater good of the greatest number.

Because they throw a great deal of light on topics and problems of this kind, it is to be hoped that Sacha Jagchid and Paul Hyer will follow up. By the same token, it is said to the reader in search of more will have found time with their inadequate bibli-

ography and index. They rightly pay tribute to the great thirteenth-century *Secret History of the Mongols*, but fail to mention that it is available in Japanese, Russian and German translation, in partial French and English translation (by Paul Pelliot and Arthur Waley) and is currently coming out in Australia, by instalments, in an "every-day" English version by Igor de Rachewitz. There is also a regrettable thin citation of sources, in French and German, not to mention the vast literature in Russian and the even more copious output, year by year, from the Mongolian People's Republic. The book is intended for the general reader, but authors is to show that the Mongols were never as barbarous as they were represented to be by the peoples whom they conquered. It is to remind the reader that in medieval Europe, the vast majority of people were ignorant and superstitious; and in late-medieval Mongolia, as in Europe, amidst the squalor and short lives, there were always a few men of astonishingly wide and deep learning.

Of the authors of this book Jagchid is a Kharchin (the uses the older transcription, Kharchin) from the south-eastern corner of Inner Mongolia. The Kharchin were among the earliest Mongols to serve as auxiliaries of the Manchus

in the conquest of China, culminating in 1644. As a consequence, they became involved in bureaucratic administration (especially of other Mongols who came later under Manchu rule), and together with the Manchus were far more deeply influenced than were the Manchus by the Mongols. They thus acquired a phenomenon not unknown among other minorities whose history includes collaboration with invading conquerors—a dual reputation. On the one hand they were considered by other Mongols to be "a bit too Chinese", careerists and opportunists who depended first on Manchu and later on Chinese favour for success and promotion. On the other hand they provided the Manchus with the most loyal of the Mongols, sent their sons to fight, and at home they wore the kilt and played the bagpipes.

Their leaders were admired and often loved, but theirs was inevitably a lost-cause nationalism because they were so soon surrounded by Chinese domination that it was impossible for them to form and lead national movements on a large enough scale. Jagchid himself has an excellent Chinese education and also handles Japanese materials. He served as a trusted administrator under the noble and tragic leader of non-communist Inner Mongolian nationalism, whose name has to be

looked up in the newspaper records of the 1930s and under its Chinese abbreviation of Tu Wanchang: Prince De. When that movement was overwhelmed by the Chinese Communist victory, Jagchid emigrated to Taiwan, where ironically the Kuomintang, no longer bothered with problems of ruling Mongolia, allowed a more free expression of Inner Mongolian nationalism than they had ever permitted when they were in power.

Paul Hyer, the other author, is a Professor at Brigham Young University, a Mormon institution in Utah where he has been the principal inspirer in developing a centre of Mongolian studies of growing importance. Like Jagchid, his principal field contacts and sources of information have been Inner Mongolians. The result of the collaboration of these two scholars is that all general statements in their book about the Mongols invariably reflect a review of all the Mongol peoples as seen from Inner Mongolia. There are also echoes of two pan-Mongol themes: a "lost-cause" nationalism for the Mongols as a whole, and a "lost-cause" nationalism for the Mongols as a whole, and a "lost-cause" nationalism for the Mongols as a whole.

"Pan-Mongolism" or "pan-Mongolism" is always a fringe phenomenon. Khatatir was used to consolidate the Turkish nation in Anatolia. "Pan-

Turkism" was a romantic, steadily weakening movement, led by a few dedicated politicians, Turkmen, Uzbek and so on, for the "overwhelming" distinction needs to be made between the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region of China, there were the Mongolian People's Republic after sixty years of close association with the Soviet Union, and apart from technicians and three or four years, Russian settlers to the number about 1 per cent of the population.

Jagchid and Hyer observe that there is always a "taken-over" distinction made between Inner Mongolian nationalism and Outer Mongolian nationalism. The lure of tin took the British, following the Chinese, to the Malay sultanates of the hinterland. What began in blood—the assassination of the British resident, J. W. Birch, in 1875—was to end with the establishment of a pacific multinational society under British rulers who were termed advisers. That society is still moderately pacific without the British presence. The Malays, now called the *bumiputera* or sons of the soil, run an elective federal kingdom, impose the Malay language, or *bahasa Malaysia*, on a narrow minority of Chinese and Indians, and back in a prosperity of tin, rubber and oil which the British did much to establish. When the six-week-old magazines (never, of course, the *TLS* or the *New Statesman*) over a *pahit* or a *stengah* was not necessarily a gesture of fancied racial superiority. If Chinese and Indians could not get into it, though the better-class Malays could, it was because of the need for an exiled Britisher to be refreshed with the illusion of drinking in his own culture, such as it was. After all,

John G. Butcher's purpose is to inquire into the manner of men these colonial British were. He is right to regard 1941 as the year of their sunset. The British who remained somewhat shamefacedly, in 1945 provided a cover for a republicanism. I was myself in a repulsive colonial officer, to help with the handing over of power to a Malay cadre which, in the Malay College of Kuala Kangsar, I had tried to do in the ways of a world bigger than the river *kompang* (now called *Kompung*). The year of British withdrawal was fixed at 1957, not worked to that deadline. Up to the humiliating débacle of 1942 the British in Malaya had no sense of an ending.

Apart from the box wallahs, or *ong penganti*, British expatriates worked either in government or in the rubber estates. Somerset Maugham thought that the planters could be divided into two classes: "The greater number of them are rough and common men of some talent, who speak English with a vile accent, or broad Scotch. . . . There are another class of planters who have been to a public school and perhaps a university." This observation was, inaccuracy. The background of planter and civil servant alike was well-spoken middle-class; the vile accents were to be found among the rubber men and, later, notoriously, among the police lieutenants recruited from the Palestine Police who served during the Emergency of the 1950s.

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The cadets and the creepers

By Anthony Burgess

JOHN G. BUTCHER:

The British in Malaya 1880-1941
The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia
263pp. Oxford University Press.
£13.95.
0 19 580419 8

Francis Light got Penang (now, as Seremban, Pulau Pinang) from the Sultan of Kedah in 1786; Stamford Raffles established a trading-post on Singapore Island in 1819; Malacca, or Melaka, became British through the Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1824. These three Malay states, then, were the Malay states for years to be known as the Straits Settlements. The lure of tin took the British, following the Chinese, to the Malay sultanates of the hinterland. What began in blood—the assassination of the British resident, J. W. Birch, in 1875—was to end with the establishment of a pacific multinational society under British rulers who were termed advisers. That society is still moderately pacific without the British presence. The Malays, now called the *bumiputera* or sons of the soil, run an elective federal kingdom, impose the Malay language, or *bahasa Malaysia*, on a narrow minority of Chinese and Indians, and back in a prosperity of tin, rubber and oil which the British did much to establish. When the six-week-old magazines (never, of course, the *TLS* or the *New Statesman*) over a *pahit* or a *stengah* was not necessarily a gesture of fancied racial superiority. If Chinese and Indians could not get into it, though the better-class Malays could, it was because of the need for an exiled Britisher to be refreshed with the illusion of drinking in his own culture, such as it was. After all,

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ing for medicine or professional competence in the violin; others had been unsuccessful solicitors. In my time I have met on the rubber estates, or, more typically, mauling at the club bar, a planter who had played the guitar with Gerald, one who had been shot at on his banana grove in South America, two who were surfeited with Ceylonese tea, three who had failed at ranching in the United States, one who had pipped his second MB seven times.

Planters and MCS men got on well enough together; they were of the same tastes as well as background and used the same jargon: *satu empat jalan* (one for the road), take a pew, damn good nut, as Foo Ong's there was jealousy, sometimes about pay differentials, but each ended, and creepers tended to despise equally the richer dealer in *Frigidaires* or Ford cars. When it came to getting a room in a Rest House, the civil servant was able to show his muscle. He took pride in displaying a Dutch commercial traveller even when he was settled down for the night. In the white men's club it was understood (and still is, in judge from the heavy legs and July 1980) that the planter should not be juxtaposed to the pressed linen slacks of the government man. A small room was frequently set aside as a rubberman's bar.

Mr Butcher stresses the importance of the club in the lives of the expatriates. That it was a precious preserve where the British could get away from the natives and "rubber" did much to establish. When the six-week-old magazines (never, of course, the *TLS* or the *New Statesman*) over a *pahit* or a *stengah* was not necessarily a gesture of fancied racial superiority. If Chinese and Indians could not get into it, though the better-class Malays could, it was because of the need for an exiled Britisher to be refreshed with the illusion of drinking in his own culture, such as it was. After all,

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Chinese did not mix with Malays, nor Indians with either. An Englishman could not visit a Muslim Cong Seng, whatever that was. The virtue of the club as a centre of segregation from the multi-racial hurly-burly is still recognized in independent Malaysia.

The great Selangor Club, or Sporting Club, flourishes. It is a place where Indian and Chinese professionals speak English together over *stengahs* or Anchor beer. They play cricket, and a European cuisine is served. There are not many Malays, or *bumiputera*, about; the lawyers and real estate specialists see too many of them during the day. The Sultan, of course, is a different kind of *bumiputera*. At the little Idara Club in Kuala Kangsar, the Sultan of Perak has a tiny gambling room, plastered with Chinese nudes, for the use of himself and his cronies. At the Ipoh Club he takes over the dance band, blowing a fair tenor saxophone. The club of Malays, like the Church of England, glory in a continuity of tradition which ignores the age of reform. They are noisier than they used to be, perhaps. A Malay lawyer will get drunk and rowdy. The Chinese perpetuate the old British spirit of decorum. Mr Butcher recognizes that the long pacific summer of the British *kerauan* could not subsist without occasional cloudbursts. It is astonishing that there were, in fact, so few storms. At the beginning of the First World War, *bumiputera* got around in the Malay Peninsula that they were to be sent to fight the Turks, their co-religionists, and the riot was quickly contained and it did not spark off disaffection for different causes among the other races. The business of segregating the races, the building of the FMS railway, caused minor trouble, and it was usually white women who were involved.

Hawking Chinese and bat-chew Indian could not be allowed to defile the presence of the travelling *meningitis* and *missis*. The expatriate women were always a nuisance as well as a blessing. Single women were goddesses in the club, and they were not female flesh appeared. When white female flesh appeared on the cinema screens of Malaya, to be drooled at by hot-blooded Asians, the status of the governing British seemed threatened. A white woman tipsy in the club, discourses sexual needs unsatisfied by an overworked and debilitated husband, was a great topic of scandal in the bazaar. It was a man's world and a realistic planter or government officer should have been content with leery sodality and the odd session with a *gasha* or *perempuan jahat*. But these men had been to decent schools and were romantic. It was the same in Burma, as Orwell reminds us. The French suffered less.

Whether the French were better colonists than the British is an academic question, but at least such Frenchmen as were planting in Malaya (Pierre Boule, for instance, and Henri Fauconnier) were kept sane by their own culture and some of them (those two, anyway) produced memorable novels based on their Malayan experiences. The British were mostly philistines, and they have left behind a heritage of philistinism. *Kampang* culture is dying, and a metropolitan culture of art galleries and orchestras seems unlikely to arise. What there is, and flourishing too, is a materialist consumerism which is threatened from the north by the communists and from the west by the militant Islam of the ayatollahs. Mr Butcher's book deals with a race of people who may well be surveyed in terms of anthropological generalization. There was no room for the brilliant or the second-rate. British women created by courageous and suffering medicaments. The building of Singapore in 1819 was a rather difficult affair.

Foreign occupation and his father's abrupt banishment to exile left an indelible mark on the Shah, which may well have been responsible for the marked ambivalence of his foreign policy. Although he had an implacable hatred for the communists, he was never able to completely overcome his mistrust of Western motives. The baleful influence of the British is a recurrent theme in his autobiography.

In 1952, the battleship JMS *Mauritius* was ordered to Abadan when Mossadeq, then Prime Minister of Iran, nationalized the oil companies. The Shah, told the British Ambassador that if Britain attacked Iran again "I will personally lead my soldiers against you". The story of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company is told with an intensity of controlled bitterness. The Shah was outraged that although Anglo-Iranian's initial investment of 100 million dollars, the Shah had been completely recovered by the beginning of the 1920s, and its income subsequently rose to something like 2,000 million dollars. "Iran was getting nothing. . . . By 1950, according to this account, Iran had received 45 million dollars in royalties, while the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company had paid to the British Government 112 million dollars in income tax alone. The final blow was that a large proportion of the company's profits were invested in oil exploration in other countries, so that humiliation was added to injustice."

The BBC earned the Shah's special contempt. He was convinced that the Persian language section of the Overseas Service had fallen into the hands of Iranian dissidents, and that from the beginning of 1978 their Farsi broadcasts were a carefully orchestrated series of attacks on his regime. He was angered by the BBC's habit of broadcasting at length the Ayatollah Khomeini's inflammatory speeches from his bolt-hole in Paris. His worst fears of British duplicity seemed to him to be confirmed at the time of his own downfall, when he was convinced that he was being consistently deceived by the British ambassador. It is significant, too, that Britain and British politicians are pointedly absent from the list of those to whom the Shah expresses gratitude for help, sympathy, and support.

The early chapters of *The Shah's Story* tell the now familiar story of the Shah's father Reza Khan, the Cossack soldier who founded the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925. Many of the Shah's political attitudes and prejudices can be traced to the circumstances of his father's abdication after British and Russian troops occupied Iran in 1941. In the memoirs of German influence, there

during his last days in exile. Pro-Western, the King of Morocco, Henry Kissinger, Richard Nixon, the President of Mexico, German and French tourists are all mentioned with varying degrees of admiration and affection.

Although he preserves a discreet silence about his mother's book, the Shah made no secret in private of his disgust at his treatment by the British Government, which at first led him to believe that he would be allowed to live in the house that he had bought in the south of England, but subsequently conveyed to him a message in the effect that his presence would cause "insuperable problems of security" and that he would therefore not be welcome.

The United States does not stand much higher in the Shah's regard. He accuses the Americans, like the British, of urging him, against his own instincts, to accelerate the process of liberalization in the autumn and winter of 1978-79. Yet unofficial American visitors were advocating firmness against the demands of his people. The confusion came to a head in January 1979 with the mysterious visit of the American General Hoyer, Deputy to the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, who warned the Iranian armed forces against any attempt to save the Shah by means of a military coup. This indiscreet incident was summed up by General Rahn, commander in Chief of the Iranian Air Force. Before being "executed" by the new regime, the General told the tribunal which conducted his travesty of a trial that "General Hoyer threw the King out of the country like a dead mouse." It is not surprising that President Carter does not even qualify for a single reference in the Shah's autobiography.

Much of the story is taken up with an account of the achievements by which the Shah believes that he should be judged as a ruler—the land reforms, the industrialization of a backward economy, the emancipation of women, the attack on illiteracy, and, most significantly, the development of the Iranian armed forces, which formed an integral part of the Shah's global security system. The Shah points out that, under his programme, the

strength of the Iranian armed forces would have been three quarters of a million by 1982. With their main battle tanks, modern artillery units, helicopters, airborne early warning radar, submarines and missiles, they would have been the most powerful military establishment in the area. But within less than two years of the Shah's overthrow they have degenerated into an ill-equipped, inadequately led and ineffective rump of an army, unable to secure their own frontiers against attack, much less to maintain the balance of power in one of the vital strategic areas of the world.

Those in the West who persistently vilified the Shah and acted as public relations officers for his enemies must not be contemplating the results of their efforts. Some satisfaction Iran itself is in a state of political and economic chaos under a regime which has become notorious for its machete mixture of incompetence and barbarism. The stability of the Middle East area is at risk and the only beneficiary is the Soviet Union.

It is possible to predict with some confidence that future historians will judge the Shah less harshly than they will many of his contemporaries. It is true, and there are passages in his book which tacitly concede the point, that excesses were committed in his name and under his authority, and as an absolute ruler he cannot escape the ultimate responsibility. Yet it is arguable that the Shah's regime was never as cruelly oppressive as his enemies claimed. Certainly his achievements have never been adequately acknowledged, even by those who professed to be his friends. His memoirs, uneven and ingenuous though they may be, reveal something of the man, a remarkable and strangely mystical man behind the public image of the arrogant, insensitive autocrat. Commenting on the rule of the mullahs in Iran he writes: "The question one asks is how long it will take the mullahs to realize that they have been made the plaything of a mirage, and that they are now in the midst of Dasht-e-Kavir, one great desert." It is a question that may be answered sooner than the Shah could have dreamed.

The sea, Sumerian-style

By John Henning

THOR HEYERDAHL:
The Tigris Expedition
326pp. George Allen and Unwin.
£7.95.
0 04 572023 1

Thor Heyerdahl has made his reputation by building ancient sailing craft, navigating them across great stretches of open sea, and thus demonstrating theoretically that early man was capable of great maritime migrations. His splendid ventures have moved backwards in time—from Kua Tiki, the raft that sailed across the Pacific to prove that South Americans could have reached Polynesia, to the Ra reed boat that crossed the Atlantic to show that man could have reached America from Africa many centuries before Columbus; and now to the very cradle of Western civilization for the most impressive of all his craft, and the most satisfying of his theories.

This new venture, the building

of a reed boat in Mesopotamia, started with few preconceived theories. Thor Heyerdahl simply wished to prove that the Sumerians were capable of building oceangoing boats from the herbi reeds that grew in such profusion in the Tigris marshes. But as the voyage progressed and the reed boat Tigris proved triumphantly that Sumerians almost stumbled upon convincing answers to a series of archaeological problems. The result is an excellent mix of mariner's yarn and historical detective work.

The first task was to build the boat, with no more guidance than rough reed drawings from upper Egypt, incisions on Sumerian clay tablets and the author's own observation of reed boats in different parts of the world. The marsh Arabs were masters of the reed boats among which they lived; Heyerdahl felt that the only people capable of shaping reed bundles into a crooked shape were Assyria Indians from Lake Thilaca. So Bolivians and Iraqis worked together—with no common language other than the mutual admiration of their craftsman. Thor Heyerdahl added his own considerable boat-building experience and the results of tests at South-

encouraged an attitude to religion which was mathematical, not spiritual. Like many of the expeditions used to man and pay for the Crusades, indulgences had the effect of centralizing the spiritual authority of the Church in the papacy, the principal cause of the disastrous hardening of arteries which afflicted late medieval Catholicism. Other factors assisted these unwelcome developments, but their origin lay in body of doctrine and ecclesiastical law devised for the Crusades.

Of these matters the contemporary chroniclers of the Crusades could not be aware, and Mr Bridge, whose elegant narrative is based on the chronicles (and not much else) is content to share their ignorance. For him the Crusades were a heroic enterprise, well meant, but even if it is a view entirely justified by the military and political history of the Crusades, to which he has deliberately confined himself.

The result, although it does not pretend to new insights or original scholarship, is a readable and accurate account of the Crusades, the subject for a general reader too idle to broach Runciman's tedious detail: it is a view entirely justified by the military and political history of the Crusades, to which he has deliberately confined himself.

The crusading indulgence, which was the most important of these,

university and practical experiments in the Tigris. The project was a raft-like catamaran, with thirty-eight masts of reeds wrapped in water-tight long woven reed mats, all sweeping up at such an angle that the boat would rise over an equatorial horizon.

Much of the excitement of the Tigris adventure came from testing such a novel craft of unproven materials on little-known waters. Heyerdahl had assembled an experienced crew of ten men from almost all their combined skills in reed boat building, and it took all their combined skills to rig and sail Tigris. There were early adventures, when the reed boat carried along the banks of the Tigris with its steering oars plunging the river mud, or when she ran onto reefs off Kuwait and had to be rescued, and a fortunate fee by Arab smugglers and a friendly Russian merchant ship. But the lessons were learned and the rigging techniques modified, and by long Tigris was sailing close to the bank, reaching difficult destinations, and with a few more adjustments, even a small reed vessel could weather seas that would have sunk a plank hull. Tons of reed, by water would break over the raft; by pushing water down appeared in an instant through the reed bundles, as Tigris bobbed up like a surfacing submarine.

With his ship still proudly afloat after five months at sea, Thor Heyerdahl disproved the theories of Runciman, the Finnish authority on the Sumerian watercraft, who had been so bold, Heyerdahl gave the lie to another accepted wisdom. Tigris was often in danger of being smashed or grounded on hostile coasts; her crew could relax only when they were far out to sea in their unbreakable boat. The author could declare with justification: "How utterly illusory it was for anyone to believe that prehistoric peopled voyages were possible only so long as the navigator could hug a mainland coast, and that ocean crossings were the impossible before the days of the Spanish caravels. Nowhere is the sea more hostile than where rocks are or where waves and currents encounter shores and shallows. To hug a coast can be the most demanding task for any primitive voyager."

Leonard Woolley revealed that the Sumerians had arrived from the south with knowledge of metals and pottery. Deciphered Sumerian tablets dealt with copper imported from Elam to Ur, and the place names Meluhha and Meluhha occur frequently in Sumerian inscriptions. Within a few days of leaving the Tigris, Tigris was at Bahrain.

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The Church military

By Jonathan Sumption

ANTONY BRIDGE:
The Crusades
314pp. Granada. £9.95.
0 246 11080 5

The crusades have had a bad press at recent times. To the Victorians the epitome of idealistic Christian heroism, to us destructive madmen moved by fanaticism. An age which is embroiled by nuclear Christianity and colonial conquest is bound to feel misgivings when confronted by a combination of both.

To part this change of sentiment reflects a revival of interest in the crusades' enemies. The Islamists of the Middle East are better known today than they were a hundred years ago, and although declining in the twelfth century, they are no longer regarded as the occasional honorary Christian like Saladin. Byzantium, the great enemy of the crusades, is now seen through the eyes of Sir Steven Runciman, not Gibbon, and is not to be dismissed as a society of mincing intrigues who had it coming to them.

Perhaps for these reasons it has become almost impossible to find a good popular history of the Crusades written in English: a history which

does not chide Richard the Lionheart for deserting the government of his country for foreign adventure, which makes no apology for the savagery of the crusaders, and which reveals the epic quality of the story. Antony Bridge has now written such a book, although it is a sign of the times, and perhaps of his status as the Dean of Guildford, that he feels obliged to tut-tut from time to time when relating some acts of particular savagery: "If the general reader is horrified by the brutality of the times, and if the Christian reader is appalled by what some of the Christians of the day did in the name of the one and the same God, other are signs that the people have been changed a little by the centuries." Perhaps.

The Crusades may have been justified by modern standards, but in respect they were no different from any medieval wars, or indeed from any other wars. In the history of Christianity matters about the Crusades was the effect which they had on the spiritual life of the time. It was very far from wholesome. Unscrupulous devices were necessary in order to recruit soldiers for a mission of crusading armies, among which class which found peace more genial and war more profitable in Europe.

The crusading indulgence, which was the most important of these,

The supreme reward of madness

By A. H. T. Levi

M. A. SCREECH:
Ecstasy and 'The Praise of Folly'
267pp. Duckworth. £21.
0 7156 1044 9

This book is essentially an analysis of Erasmus's treatment of the related themes of rapture and ecstasy, with special reference to the final section of *The Praise of Folly* in which Folly's doctrine of the divine is shown to be a development of the theology of ecstasy as developed from the Bible and various neo-Platonic sources, chiefly by the Greek Fathers. The analysis, although indisputably learned, will no doubt be challenged, notably because it sometimes forces the evidence and also because it plays down the possible reliance of Erasmus on the scholastic tradition and on the Italian neoplatonists. But whether or not M. A. Screech is broadly right, his book does raise a serious problem in the compartmentalization of learning which is seldom discussed, but for which a solution is long overdue.

Professor Screech is undoubtedly one of our most distinguished Renaissance scholars, specializing in the intellectual history of humanism, especially evangelical humanism, in early sixteenth-century France. In this book he shows not only the close familiarity with the Bible which characterizes all his work, but also that he can at any time find his way round the Greek Fathers. Yet, perhaps over-identifying with his humanists, he seems unable to regard the medieval scholastics as much more than figures of fun.

The fact is that the history of medieval philosophy and theology is still seriously taught for the most part only inside the spiritually committed atmosphere of Catholic seminaries and religious communities. The texts of even important scholastics are generally available only in their libraries and, more importantly, the expertise required to understand them resides almost wholly in their staffs. What this book chiefly proves is that even the best intellectual historians not trained in one of the major Catholic institutions have as much chance of understanding what the scholastic

theologians were arguing about as most of us who counted only with a pile of raw materials, a few DIY manuals and a tool kit.

The divide is leading to strange anomalies. In the histories of literature, law and political institutions, as in social, political and art history, it has now been established that change during the northern Renaissance was both slow and gradual. The accent has been put more and more on the continuities. Only in those fields most subject to sectarian pressure—the histories of religion, theology, spirituality and perhaps education—do we still tend to accept the notion of a cultural break in the early sixteenth century, in which a "humanist" movement attempted to replace what is referred to as the "Gothic" barbarism of the middle ages. Such a view is increasingly if tardily coming to look simply implausible. It is a fair assumption that if more about scholastic theology, the continuities in religion, theology, spirituality and education too would quickly become plainer.

Professor Screech's new book is presented in tandem with his recent *Rebels*, with which it shares the same publisher, printer, type-face and binding. In many ways the two works share the same merits and defects: vast erudition, a certain insensitivity to literary registers, a discovery of greater importance however, different. *Rebels* is an account of the humanists, and the author who wrote it is a humanist, and although he has little sympathy for, or knowledge of, what Rabelais was attacking, his commentary is certainly illuminating. *Ecstasy and 'The Praise of Folly'* is the history of the mind of medieval spirituality and theology through which he has to walk if he is effectively to cover his field.

There are very good new things in the book, like the detailed account of the importance of the 1514 edition, the importance for Erasmus of certain authors like Theophrastus, and the play made by Folly of ecstatic forgetfulness. Ancient sources are used with skill. The erudition is ingenious, and the analyses of rapture and ecstasy are fascinating, if one-sided—they neglect the very and occasionally uncommitted nature of Folly's arguments even in the moving and

animated final section of what Erasmus called his *Folly*. The real strength lies in the way in which Screech brings to bear on Folly's assertions remarks made by Erasmus himself elsewhere, illuminating their meaning and incidentally destroying Erasmus's defence that nothing in the *Folly* can be taken seriously, because it is Folly's own mouth, a defence intended to be taken seriously, since he defended Folly's name, shocking assertions personally in his famous letter of 1515 to Martin Dorp.

Screech's achievement should not be underrated. The *Paraphrases* in particular, as well as the *New Testament* and its annotations, are plundered with real skill, although inevitably with regard to changes of register. This is only because Erasmus's degree of commitment to the cogency of his arguments and positions could increase or diminish, while the arguments themselves could be used on different levels. Even in the debate with Luther, when Erasmus was quite determined to defend free will, he deploys some of his arguments with his tongue in his cheek, seeking to persuade more than to prove, no doubt partly to avoid the counter-charge of Pelagianism. Similarly, in the *Enchiridion* in 1522 he defends Origen partly by arguments which it is difficult to believe he or anybody else could have taken seriously. For fairly obvious historical reasons he took to using arguments from a virtuous, swathing them in like a lawyer aware of his own forensic skills, only rarely attempting a cool appeal to logic. He found satire a more effective weapon.

There are also, however, more serious weaknesses in Screech's approach to Erasmus. We are told, for instance, that Erasmus "delighted in rubbing home" the lesson that "on many an occasion Nicolas of Lyra, or Duns Scotus, 1514 edition, the importance for Erasmus of certain authors like Theophrastus, and the play made by Folly of ecstatic forgetfulness. Ancient sources are used with skill. The erudition is ingenious, and the analyses of rapture and ecstasy are fascinating, if one-sided—they neglect the very and occasionally uncommitted nature of Folly's arguments even in the moving and

Greek as an argument. It is also unnecessarily cloak-trailing to the categories of 1 Thessalonians, one of the towering figures in the intellectual history of Europe, and Scotus, who thought as subtly as Descartes and used language as imperitously as Heidegger, with the vulgarizing Nicolas of Lyra and an obscure thirteenth-century Biblical commentator.

His anti-scholastic *parti pris*—Scotus, whom it was normal to caricature as the archetypal scholastic booby—makes it difficult for Screech to understand many of the levels at which Erasmus writes and argues. Erasmus did, after all, study at Montaigne and subsequently went to some trouble to be awarded the doctorate in scholastic theology which he had earned. He not infrequently parades attitudes to, and even exploits scholastic argument.

Screech however treats the scholastics with something like contempt, referring to them, for instance, by giving page numbers to arbitrary editions, so that it is impossible to verify what he says unless you happen to come across a copy of the edition he has used. (There is of course a convention of referring to the various subdivisions of scholastic texts so that a reader can refer to them in a reader edition.) This sort of insouciance extends even (page 154) to introducing a Latin bawler into the title of one scholastic text, which is strange in an author otherwise so fastidious about exact nuances of usage.

One is not surprised, after this, that Screech shows no aversion either of the way in which Erasmus dichotomized between different whole-fascinating intellectual drama enacted in Europe from the twelfth century to the late fifteenth. I find it difficult to identify commonplaces, like the *purvis-studi* coupling, badly over-systematized scholastic faculty psychology, so allowing himself to draw unwa-

anted conclusions from it. The matter of the spiritual categories of 1 Thessalonians would have profited had he used Erasmus's familiarity with Roman liturgy, and underplays the influence of della Mirandola, who had of course aligned himself with the scholastics, on Erasmus's *de Origen*. He also relies too much on out-dated and ideologically tainted works of reference when there are now safer and available, notably in German.

I myself find Screech's *Ecstasy* too dry and seriously lacking in the element of imagination to be found almost everywhere in his writings. It is difficult to take seriously the praise of the *Folly*, but it is also difficult to believe Erasmus did not enjoy it as a semi-serious game, remembered by her as a game, and even herself by also being serious. Screech gives us some interesting insights into the ultimate purpose of certain of Folly's lines.

It has to be remembered that Erasmus, who by 1511 was committed to humanist theological pursuits, was brought up in the intellectual spirituality of the Brethren of the Common Life, the *Folly* contains the close elements of intellectual uncertainty. It knows what is wrong, but is not clear about what is right. It is very tentative satire, and even the committedly pious final *Folly* cannot prevent herself from parodying theological argument.

In a book as ambitious as this there should be a bibliography, in a book as expensive as this in a book as expensive as this Greek words should be in Greek type and not in tiresome English transliterations.

Know thy place

By Peter Burke

HEATHER ARDEN:
Fools' Plays
211pp. Cambridge University Press.
£21.22513 2

Fools' Plays is a study of satire in the French *sottie*, defined as a short play in which actors dressed as fools appear. It focuses on such plays, dating from the 1420s to the 1570s, but concentrated in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. These plays have of course been much studied in the past hundred years or so. Heather Arden's contribution in the first place, there is a workmanlike chapter on the *sottis* as drama, the 283 rules and their functions, in which she analyses some of the dramatic schemata most commonly employed, distinguishing three basic rules (evil-doer, victim and accuser), and arguing that the plays are "a symbolic reaffirmation of group values and rejection of a threatening force".

In the second place, and at greater length, the author concerns herself with the relationship between the plays and the society of the time. After dealing rather briefly with the awkward questions of the authors and the audience of the plays, she focuses on the social attitudes expressed in them. Generally speaking, women are satirized as "unfaithful, changeable, and socially pretentious", the nobility, for falling short of their traditional duty to defend the

work; the upper clergy, for the desire of power; and the lower clergy, for the sins of the flesh. The third estate is not satirized collectively, but "gens nouveaux" (the upwardly mobile), later town-keepers and sergeants (and the lower echelons of the legal profession), all receive a fair amount of stick.

Arden has done a useful job of literary analysis. She is right to suggest that the *sottis* is a "Chaucerian" *farce* or "mystery", a fair summary of the moral and social attitudes expressed in the whole corpus of plays. The authors think in terms of a society of status in which the individual of *estates* may know his place or tries to change it, and in the whole corpus of plays. The authors think in terms of a society of status in which the individual of *estates* may know his place or tries to change it, and in the whole corpus of plays.

The social analysis is less satisfactory. Arden ends by describing the *sottis* as "an expression of class antagonism", and explaining this antagonism by the widening gap between rich and poor in this period. The first point does not emerge from the preceding analysis; it is simply tacked on. The author does not explain why what she is doing is the language of class, and does not question the social hierarchy, to express class antagonism. The second point, about the polarization of French society in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, has no evidence offered for it beyond a casual reference to Girard. "Chaucer did *not* fall for *estates*."

graphical area: Portuguese-Galician, Spanish, Catalan, Gascon, Provençal, Occitan, Franco-Provençal, French (Langue d'Oïl), Rhetoroman, Sardinian, Italian, Dalmatian, Romanian. Accompanying notes which are explanatory notes which provide general background information. Students in understanding difficult sections and translations of all passages in Latin. A detailed glossary is also provided, which includes most individual words occurring in the texts.

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Closing date November 7, 1980.

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